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Key trends, issues and solution offers of international relations education in Turkey

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Abstract

International relations is a cross-disciplinary science that examines the relationships of states which are considered as the main actors of international relations with other actors of the international system such as other states, international organizations and multinational companies. International Relations Science of which importance has grown after the Second World War in the World began to be evaluated as an independent science. Until international relations became a systematic discipline, studies in this area were made in the context of disciplines such as political science, law, diplomacy history. The Department of International Relations, which was established at Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences for the first time in Turkey, is present in many universities today and provides training to thousands of students. International Relations is sometimes perceived as a side branch of some sciences because of its close relationship with many sciences and not having a long history since the adoption of it as an independent science. However, lack of academicians in the present departments in Turkey impedes conceptual and systematic training related to International Relations and increases the number of courses including political history and regional analysis. In this study, problems will be put forward by giving information about the present departments of International Relations after examining the historical development of International Relations science in Turkey.

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1. What is International Relations

The concept of International Relations was first used to refer to relations among the sovereign states. With this point of view, International Relations is accepted to begin with the 1648 Westphalia Treaty through which sovereign states became the main actors of the international system and the principles such as state sovereignty, legal equality and inviolability of borders were accepted. The emergence of sovereign states began with Europe's entering a process called interstate relations by leaving to be a (absolute) mosaic of states towards the end of the 17th century (Keyman, 2006). The centralization of authority and sovereignty brought by enlightenment and modernization, meaning collected by the king, the separation of church and state, and recognizing of these absolutist monarchies each other resulted in the emergence of "sovereign and independent states" (Kurubaş,

2012). During this period, a more secular network of relationships among European countries emerged with the reduction of the church's authority, and a European structure consisting of sovereign states standing out from the imperial conception emerged as a result of the absence of a significant difference among the states recognizing the existence of each other basically. In this structure, relationships have become anarchic and horizontal, not hierarchical and vertical, due to the absence of a superior authority.

Another view is that International Relations contains not only interstate relations but also the political, economic and commercial relations among governments, people and even individuals in parallel with the developments of our age in communication and transportation technologies. Today, an individual, for example General Secretary of the UN, may affect the fate of International Relations more than one state. Similarly, the owners of multinational companies (e.g. General Motors) can become a more effective international actor than many states. In this regard, it is seen that International Relations today is conducted in a manner different from the time when the nation-states were considered as the main actors. In conclusion, International Relations, in the broadest definition, contains all the formal or informal relations at the political, economic and social level taking place between the individuals and social groups of a state and the ones of another state as well as expressing the relations of a state with the other states (Arı, 2011). According to the understanding accepting International Relations as a part of political science, it is defined as "the branch of political science dealing with the relations between the national-level political units and also dealing with the factors such as geography and economics determining especially foreign policy, the organization and functioning of government and foreign policy" (Ayдын, 1996). In addition to this, making predictions about the future is also within the definition of International Relations according to the behavior of the international actors.

At this point, it can be said that International Relations is a vague, fuzzy and very widely used term with two basic meanings. The first meaning is about previously-defined one related to interstate relations. In this sense, the term can be disturbed with 'International Politics'. But International Relations is wider than International Politics, and it covers International Policy (Knutsen, www.eolss.net). International policy in this respect is considered as subunits of International Relations. The term of International Relations with this first meaning was created and used by Jeremy Bentham in his book "Principles of Morals and Legislations" written in 1789 (Knutsen, www.eolss.net). The second meaning of the term International Relations refers to an academic discipline the same as law, economics, and sociology. This second meaning of the term International Relations begins with the establishment of the first chair of the field at the University of Wales in 1919. Thus, the term International Relations was opened to scientific inspection and verification for the first time (Knutsen, www.eolss.net). International Relations has developed different theories to identify and to explain recurring patterns of International Relations from the outbreak of World War I until the present day. Today, in addition to the departments such as Political Science and Public Administration, International Relations departments sharing close areas with these departments have been opened.

2. Development of International Relations Science in the World

We know that International Relations science was considered as a part of many science branches many years before its adoption as an independent discipline of science. The concept of "International" was first used by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. When it was used for the first time, the concept corresponded to the concept *intergentes* with the same meaning in Latin (Arı, 2011). Authors using the concept have used it to express international law which is referred to *jus gentium* in Latin and includes the rules regulating the relations between sovereign states as a branch of law. In this respect, the concept has been used to express political and legal relations between sovereign states for long years (Arı, 2011).

Experts of the related subject have different opinions about the beginning of International Relations. According to Hostie, the beginning of International Relations can be carried back to the period when the first social groups started communication with each other (Ayhan, 2007). Kauppi and Viotti, who revealed a similar opinion with Hostie, have argued that International Relations need to be addressed to the date when the history started to be recorded (Knutsen, 1997). However, the scientists with other views like Dougherty and Pfalzgraff have argued that International Relations as a discipline which began with the First World War (Knutsen, 1997). At this point,

we can say that International Relations progressed from the most primitive social groups to the period when the phenomenon of state in the modern sense settled due to the fact that social groups underwent an evolutionary transformation in the historical process. However, since the theoretical studies on International Relations started to be done in the aftermath of the First World War, especially after the Second World War, the tendency to accept this date as the milestone as a discipline has increased. In addition, the investigation of the subjects related to International Relations, which were initially analyzed in the context of the sciences such as Diplomatic History, Political Science, Law, Economics, in the the context of International Relations as an independent science with more theoretical and systematic perspective by Western countries, mainly the USA, in the aftermath of the First World War supports the views of thinkers like Dougherty and Pfalzgraff. Results and Assessments

3. Development of International Relations Science in Turkey

Mekteb-i Mülkiye forming the basis of the Faculty of Political Sciences, in which International Relations education was given for the first time, has a long history.¹ Mekteb-i Mülkiye was opened in Istanbul on 12 February 1859 for bringing up the officers and administrators the Ottoman Empire needed within the framework of the reforms of Tanzimat Period (Ata, www.academia.edu). After a number of changes in the period of Sultan Abdulhamid II, it was named Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane with a reference to the Sultan. At this school, which may be considered as the public administration school of the Ottoman Empire, courses such as international law, political history as well as subjects such as history, geography, law, economics, foreign languages were taught, and education to inform bureaucratic trainees about international system was also given (Erhan, www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr).

The school, which was thought negatively by the Young Turks during the Second Constitutional Era because it was under the auspices of Abdulhamid II, was closed in 1915 during World War I, and continued to education again towards the end of the war in 1918.² Mülkiye, which was moved to its current building in Ankara in 1936, was named School of Political Sciences. In 1950, it was connected to Ankara University with the name Faculty of Political Sciences (Ata, www.academia.edu). Until the Department of International Relations was constructed as a discipline in the Faculty of Political Sciences, issues related to this subject were tried to be taught with various names in various departments or to be covered in the courses such as diplomatic history and political history.

According to Mustafa Aydın, the first course for International Relations in Turkey was given with the name “Hukuk-i Düvel ve Diplomatik Muhabere” in Political Branch in Mekteb-i Mülkiye in 1926 (Uluslararası İlişkiler, 2005). When it is thought that the studies in the field of International Relations began after the First World War and the first chair was opened in 1919, we can say that studies in this field began in Turkey soon after the World. After 1950, studies in the field of International Relations in the Faculty of Political Sciences started to be given with scientific techniques and more comprehensively. According to Duygu Bazoğlu Sezer quoting from Türkaya Ataöv, International Relations studies began in Turkey by taking the course ‘Milletlerarası Münasebetler’ in the curriculum in Political Branch in the Faculty of Political Sciences (Uluslararası İlişkiler, 2005). In this period, three sub-themes were organized as ‘chair’ in Political Department. These were Interstate General Law, Interstate Private Law and Political History. International Relations course began to be taught by Prof. Dr. Suat Bilge without determining exactly what chair it belonged to, and it was organized as ‘chair’ in the second half of the 1960s. These four chairs began working with an organic relationship under the umbrella of the Institute of Foreign Relations in the Faculty of Political Sciences (Uluslararası İlişkiler, 2005). The department with the name of “Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Department” (Political Branch) between the years 1955-

¹ Chronological details related to the Faculty of Political Sciences has been taken from the book “Mekteb-i Mülkiye’den Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesine: 150 Yılın Kronolojisi” by M. Murat Baskıcı. See (<http://www.politics.ankara.edu.tr/MM-Kronoloji.pdf>), (10.04.2014).

² Young Turks demonstrated their reaction to Mülkiye Mektebi with Interior Statute released in 1915. This statute eliminated preferences for Mülkiye graduates unlike during Abdulhamid II, and the collection allocated from the general budget to Mülkiye Mektebi was removed in 1915. The school was connected to the Faculty of Law with the name “Darülfünun Ulum-u Siyasiye Şubesi” by removing the legal personality of it. The school was re-opened in 1918 with the help of the teachers and the graduates effective in the government.

1982 was named “ Department of International Relations” with the regulation made in the Law on Higher Education in 1982 (www.politics.ankara.edu.tr).

Studies in the field of International Relations mostly took place in the Faculty of Political Sciences for many years. The Faculty of Political Sciences lost its monopoly in this field through the establishment of the department with the name of International Relations in the framework of amendments in the Law on Higher Education by the Constitution of 1982 (Koçer, 2007). International Relations courses began to be given in various departments and programs at Middle East Technical University, Bogazici University and Istanbul University. In this process, chairs related to International Relations (such as Istanbul University, Faculty of Economics, and Political Science Chair), relevant branches (such as the Political Branch of Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences) and so on were constructed, and new departments with the same name were established. Istanbul University Faculty of Economics, Uludag University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Middle East Technical University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences are among the first universities to open the Department of International Relations beside the Faculty of Political Sciences (Koçer, 2007).

Nowadays, International Relations education provides education at the undergraduate level with different names at many universities.³ These programs have been organized under the names “International Relations”, “Political Science and International Relations”, “The European Union and International Relations” and “Global and International Relations”. According to November 2013 data, International Relations is taught by various names in 93 out of 165 existing universities in Turkey. While the departments with the name International Relations are present in the majority of these universities, the name ‘Political Science and International Relations’ has been preferred in especially recently established private universities. Some universities (such as Maltepe University) provide education with the name ‘International Relations and the European Union’. The most important issue striking at this point is ‘Political Science’s being a field which literally cannot be shared by neither the Department of International Relations nor the Department of Public Administration. While the departments with the name ‘Political Science and Public Administration’ have been established at some universities (such as Adnan Menderes University), ‘Political Science and International Relations’ is used as the department name at some other universities (such as Marmara University and Bahçeşehir University). In some universities (for example TOBB Economics and Technology University, Galatasaray University), only ‘Political Science’ is used as a department name. The absence of the department of Public Administration at the universities initiating ‘Political Science’ as the department is another point drawing attention. While some universities (such as Maltepe University) have established departments with the name ‘the European Union and International Relations’, some universities (such as Bilgi University and Bahçeşehir University) have preferred only the name ‘the European Union’ for the European Union as a field of International Relations. In three universities (Middle East Technical University, Boğaziçi University and Bilkent University), departments with the name ‘Global and International Relations’ have been opened beside the Department of International Relations. As of November 2013, 113.959 students study International Relations at the universities in Turkey.⁴ Considering these data, the department of International Relations has lost its being a feminine department in the last ten years. Department of International Relations, which used to be preferred by mostly girls in 2000s, became a department which male students study more according to 2013 data. In 2013, 64.940 male and 49.019 female students continue to study International Relations.

³ Data in this section have been taken from the official site of ÖSYM. Since the study contains the universities in Turkey, universities outside Turkey which are present in ÖSYM guide have been ignored. ([http://dokuman.osym.gov.tr/pdfdokuman/2013/OSYS/2013%20%C3%96SYS%20KONT%20KILAVUZU%20BASKI%20\(Tablo%204\)_K_B.pdf](http://dokuman.osym.gov.tr/pdfdokuman/2013/OSYS/2013%20%C3%96SYS%20KONT%20KILAVUZU%20BASKI%20(Tablo%204)_K_B.pdf)), (10.05.2014).

⁴ These data have been obtained from the center of information of the Council of Higher Education (www.bilgiedinmeyanitlama@yok.gov.tr), (01.05.2014).

4. General Situation and Problems of the Department of International Relations

International Relations sciences showing significant development since the beginning of the 20th century was discussed as a field of various sciences for many years and started activity as an independent department in the Faculty of Political Sciences in 1982 for the first time. Therefore, the Department of International Relations in Turkey does not have a long history for the development of a department. This situation also brings some problems and shortcomings. First, a significant number of the instructors, especially professors, working in the Department of International Relations in Turkey are not the graduates of the department. Besides, the small number of theoretical courses results in perceiving International Relations as a part of political history. This situation increases the number of the studies on current events examination instead of theory at the academic level. In that respect, the evaluation of Suat Bilge from the Faculty of Political Sciences in 1961 still remains valid. Bilge uttered in a speech: “Everyone is studying current issues, doing events examination. In recent years, studies on the conceptual framework and theoretical approach have also highly reduced. This hinders the development of a systematic, conceptual discipline of work in our field, and leads us to a chronological narrative of political events. We must avoid this, and we must establish a discipline having a more conceptual framework” (Uluslararası İlişkiler, 2005). Another problem faced with in recent years is the tendency of the explanation of the issues related to International Relations to the society by those who are not experts of the issue but have a high popularity along with the increase of private television channels. This situation results in the increase of the superficial studies in order to meet the expectations as to the rising conjuncture in parallel with strengthening of consumer society coming from the society, the market and the media (www.uik.org.tr).

Due to the opening of many universities in recent years, there is a lack of instructors in the departments of International Relations at the new universities. This situation causes the increase of the courses including topics for regional analysis and the reduction of the theoretical courses. In addition, the absence of adequate textbooks and the lack of the quality of some of the current textbooks is another factor making the education in the field difficult (www.uik.org.tr). As major instructors of the field of International Relations stated in the International Relations Workshop in 2005, International Relations’ having almost no interdisciplinary studies with other disciplines in contrast with the other countries beside not having a relationship with its sub-disciplines at an adequate level appears as an important lack (www.uik.org.tr). Knowledge of foreign languages of the graduates of the Department of International Relations is one of the most important requirements. However, in universities where courses are taught with only foreign language, such a situation that the quality of education is lower than expected is faced (Uluslararası İlişkiler, 2005).

Conclusion

The science of International Relations showing the rapid development in the world during World War I has increasingly become an area of interest only after 1950. Courses related to this field were taught as a subject in several departments for many years, and the “Department of International Relations” was established with the regulations of the Council of Higher Education in 1982. The Department of International Relations existing in many of the universities in Turkey is faced with the problems such as the scarcity of textbooks at the theoretical level, shortages of teaching staff who has grown in the field (especially in newly established universities). While universities have the problem of skilled faculty shortage, that those who are not the experts of the subject express the issues and developments related to international relations especially on private television channels almost every day also minimizes the reputation of the science of International Relations. One of the reasons of the shortage of qualified faculty members is department students’ problem of foreign language learning during their undergraduate education. Lack of resources in Turkish obliges academicians to head to foreign resources. The studies of the academicians having difficulties in foreign language remain weak. Foreign language learning should be given utmost importance for a qualified education of International Relations in Turkey. This is not a problem that can be overcome by teaching in foreign language. This problem can only be overcome through

universities teaching in Turkish as well as providing the opportunity of the education of English and other foreign language.

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